



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### EGY42420.E

Egypt: Al-Tar vendetta feuds; underlying philosophy and principles; areas or groups that participate in it; how Egyptian law addresses it; reaction of authorities to violence committed in this tradition  
Direction des recherches, Commission de l'immigration et du statut de réfugié, Ottawa

According to several sources consulted, Al-Tar, or blood feuds are not uncommon in rural Upper (or southern) Egypt (BBC 10 Aug. 2002; *Al-Ahram* 15-21 Aug. 2002; *The Times* 12 Aug. 2002; AP 23 Aug. 2002). This area is also known for a widespread availability of weapons (*ibid.*). Another source indicated that vendetta killings were particularly common in rural parts of the country (UPI 11 Aug. 2002).

Al-tar feuds often originate in conflicts over money and land, and may last over half a century (*Al-Ahram* 15-21 Aug. 2002). Killings are justified on the basis of protecting "honour, pride, or land," but conflicts are usually limited to "an eye for an eye" (*ibid.*; *Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002). Only by killing a member of the murderer's family can a clan regain its honour and mourn its deceased (AFP 12 June 2003; *Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002). The vendetta, obligatory for all male clan members, does not have to target the actual murderer, as long as the retaliation is deemed proportional to the original murder (*Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002). An underlying philosophy of revenge killings seems to be "*Al-Tar Wala Al-'Aar*" or, "vendetta is better than disgrace" (*Al-Ahram* 15-21 Aug. 2002).

Theoretically, a murderer can be pardoned by the family of the victim by crossing the village barefoot with a shroud on his head that he will then proceed to place at the feet of the head of the rival family as a gesture of apology (AFP 12 June 2003). In practice, however, such men are often killed during the procession in order to avoid any further disgrace to the bereaved family (*ibid.*). According to a local southern Egyptian, "people in Upper Egypt will sometimes wait ten or twenty years before carrying out a revenge killing.... Most of the time there's nothing the police can do, it's part of life down there" (*The Times* 12 Aug. 2002). Some feuds have been known to have links to Islamic fundamentalist groups (BBC 10 Aug. 2002; *Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002).

In 1995, a blood feud outside a mosque in Al-Minya resulted in 24 deaths (*Al-Ahram* 15-21 Aug. 2002). Three years later, seven members involved in the Al-Minya massacre were murdered in retaliation (*ibid.*; BBC 10 Aug. 2002).

One major feud is that between the El-Hanashat and Abdel-Halim families of Beit Allam, in the Sohag governorate of Upper Egypt (*Al-Ahram* 15 Aug. 2002). A fight between two children in 1990 quickly escalated into the murder of two members of the El-Hanashat family at the hand of two Abdel Halim clan members (*ibid.*). A decade later, members of El-Hanashat killed and injured two Abdel-Halims in order to get even (*ibid.*). Authorities moved quickly to try to disarm locals by seizing over 40 weapons, mostly automatic rifles (*ibid.*). They also arranged several reconciliatory meetings between the El-Hanashats and the Abdel-Halims in an attempt to stave off another potential revenge killing, but to no avail (*ibid.*). On 10 August 2002, while several members of the El-Hanashat family were on their way to attend a court hearing for their relatives accused in the Abdel-Halim murder, a group of Abdel-Halims ambushed their convoy (*ibid.*). What followed was a machine-gun massacre in which twenty-two members of the El-Hanashat family lost their lives, the worst massacre in Upper Egypt since 1995 (*ibid.*; BBC 10 Aug. 2002; *Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002).

The massacre was unusual in that it broke with the Al-Tar tradition on several fronts (*ibid.*). The number of victims "grossly" outweighed what would have been expected in a "tit-for-tat" ratio, and women and children were among the victims, two groups that are normally exempt from all blood feuds (*ibid.*). All Abdel-Halims subsequently disappeared from Beit Allam, fearing an inevitable retribution (*ibid.*). Police refused permission for the El-Hanashats to hold a funeral to minimize another potential bloodbath, and buried the victims themselves (*Jerusalem Post* 28 Aug. 2002).

Following the August 2002 massacre, the majority of El-Hanashat men who were married to members of the Abdel-Halim family decided to divorce their wives (*Al-Ahram* 15-21 Aug. 2002). According to tradition, the fact that the El-Hanashats refused to accept condolences is a sign that they plan to avenge their deceased relatives, despite the beefing up of security forces in the area and numerous attempts to bring about reconciliation (*Irish Times* 6 Sept. 2002).

Six Abdel-Halims were sentenced to death by hanging by a criminal court for their role in the deadly ambush; a further ten were found guilty of supplying the weapons used in the killing and were sentenced to life in prison with no right to appeal (AFP 12 June 2003).

One source mentioned an ongoing blood feud between the El Azazmeh and the Tay'a Bedouin tribes, who straddle the Israeli-Egyptian border (*Jewish News Weekly* 26 Mar. 1999).

A blood feud can become exacerbated if Muslims and Copts are involved, going from a simple family vendetta to a religious conflict (*The Estimate* 11 Feb. 2000). Since police officers are enlisted from the local area that they serve, confessional animosities between Muslims and Christians can influence police behaviour (ibid.).

In 1998, two Copts were murdered in the town of El Kosheh (ibid.). While the Christian community believed that the killer was a Muslim seeking to avenge the death of his own brother, local authorities decided that the unknown killer was a Christian (ibid.), perhaps to avoid a large-scale religious conflict (*Cairo Times* 1 Oct. 1998). Policemen proceeded to round up between 500 (according to the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights or EOHR) and 1,200 Copts (according to Coptic Bishop Wissa) for questioning (ibid.). Once in police custody, at a police station or in the mountains, villagers allege that these Copts were subjected to "various forms of torture" (ibid.). A correspondent interviewed 54 people who claimed that they had been victims of torture, and most bore physical scars (ibid.). According to interviewees, policemen threatened the detained women with rape, extorted money from inmates, and tortured several people to the point where many had to be hospitalized (ibid.). All those who were tortured (but not all those who were detained) were apparently Copts, and according to priests all the policemen were Muslim (ibid.). As a result, many Copts believed that they were being discriminated against for their religious affiliation (*The Estimate* 11 Feb. 2000).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet Sites, including:** Amnesty International, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, The Salt Lake Tribune, US Department of State

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